

Cragsmoor Historical Journal

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CHETOLAH Cragsmoor's Most Magnificent Home



Chetolah during the Inness's residence

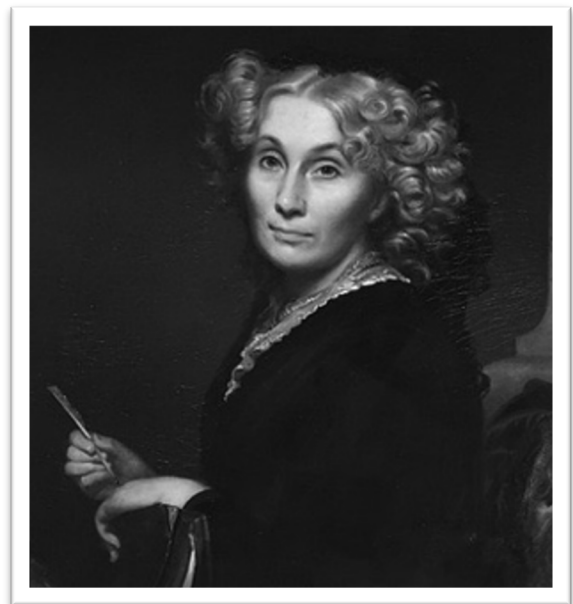
Cragsmoor has many magnificent historic structures: The Cragsmoor Historic District, recognized by the state and national registers of historic places, lists 168 buildings (mostly homes), 15 structures and 11 objects. But none is as formidable as Chetolah, the 42-room mansion built almost 125 years ago (1901-02) by artist George Inness, Jr. and his wife, Julia G. Smith Inness. It was said at the time to have cost almost \$1 million, which would be the equivalent of \$34 million today. This is the story of that historic property.

Chetolah was the name chosen for the property by Eliza Pratt Greatorex, a celebrated nineteenth century artist who began visiting the Shawangunks in the 1860s and was drawn particularly to Cragsmoor. Along with Edward Lamson Henry, she was a founder of the Cragsmoor art colony, although she receives less credit for that than she probably deserves.

Ms. Greatorex was born Eliza Pratt in Manorhamilton, Ireland, on Christmas Day 1819, the daughter of a Methodist minister named James Calcott Pratt. The family moved to New York in 1840, when Eliza was just 21, and in 1849 she married Henry Wellington Greatorex, an English musician who had served as the organist at Westminster Abbey. Henry was a widower with a young son, and together they

had three more children: Kathleen Honora, Elizabeth Eleanor and Thomas. But Henry Greatorex died of yellow fever while on tour in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1858. He was only 42 years old, and he left Eliza with four children under the age of 15.

Eliza had begun studying art before Henry died, but when she was widowed, she realized that she needed to provide for her family, and a career in art seemed the best choice. Like so many other Cragsmoor artists, including both Innesses and Charles Courtney Curran, Eliza went to Paris to study, first with the painter Emile Lambinet and later with Charles Henri Toussaint. She befriended Impressionist painter Alfred Sisley, with whom she remained connected for the rest of her life. She traveled between Europe and America, spending time in New York as well as the Rocky Mountains. Her most celebrated work was *Old New York from the Battery to Bloomingdale*, a book of drawings of historic buildings that had been demolished during the post-Civil-War real estate boom in New York. In 1868, she was elected an associate of the National Academy of Design in New York, the acknowledged arbiter of American painting. She was only the second woman elected, after Ann Hall, who had died some six years earlier.



Portrait of Eliza Pratt Greatorex (1869) by Ferdinand Thomas Lee Boyle: Credit National Academy of Design, New York

In the 1860s, Eliza had begun visiting and painting in the Shawangunks, which she appreciated both for their natural beauty and for the growing community of artists like E.L. Henry. So, in 1883, her eldest daughter, Kathleen, took title to a rustic farmhouse on the southeastern side of Cragsmoor, which was described by a friend:

That is a mountain farmhouse, upon which the artists came by accident, and which had been too long neglected and deserted to tempt any practical person, but which was attractive beyond description to lovers of the picturesque. From the piazza of the weather-beaten old house the view extends over a valley more than twenty miles in length, following the windings of the Hudson, until it disappears among the mountains at Cornwall. The region is famous for its wild berries, and the gatherers who come from far and near are delightful subjects for the artist's brush, and the wild roads blaze with rhododendrons, azaleas and fields of laurel.

They gave their new home the name "Chetolah," which they were said to have understood to mean "Sweet Repose."

Eliza had recently experienced heartache – her son, Thomas, had been killed in a brawl in Colorado in 1881 – and Cragsmoor (or Evansville, as it was then known) was a place of solace for the family. But not for long. Eliza returned to France in 1885 and never came back to Chetolah. In her absence, the old house was occupied by her sister, Matilda Pratt Despard, and Matilda's family. Matilda was an author: She provided the text for her sister's sketch book of *Old New York*.

On February 8, 1897, Eliza died in Paris, and she was buried in Moret-sur-Loing, where she had been living with her two unmarried daughters, Kathleen, and Eleanor, both of whom had also become artists. Two years later, her dear friend Alfred Sisley was buried in the same plot, as were both her daughters, Eleanor in 1908 and Kathleen in 1942.

Three years after Eliza's death, the Innesses entered the picture. On November 12, 1900, Kathleen Greatorex sold Chetolah to "Julia G. Inness," the wife of George Inness, Jr. Julia was the only daughter of Roswell Smith (1829-1892), a wealthy publisher and art patron who had helped launch Inness, Jr.'s career by buying a large canvas of New Hampshire's Mount Washington. Roswell Smith had been a co-founder in 1870 of *Scribner's Monthly: An Illustrated Magazine for the People*, along with Gilbert Holland and Charles Scribner, of the book publishing company of the same name. Smith was the business manager for the venture. Eventually Smith bought out Scribner and changed the name of the magazine to *The Century*

Illustrated Monthly Magazine. These moves resulted in prosperity during the 1880s, and Smith undoubtedly died a rich man in 1892, with Julia his only child. The Innesses had previously purchased their home in Montclair, New Jersey – Wentworth Manor – from Smith in 1889.

The artistic career of George Inness, Jr., was recounted at some length in *George Inness, Jr., in Tarpon Springs, Florida*, which appeared in this *Cragsmoor Historical Journal*, Vol. 21, Issue 3, Fall, 2021. George and Julia had returned to France after the death of his father, the celebrated Hudson River painter George Inness, in 1894, and George Jr., had begun to spend winters in Tarpon Springs as early as 1890.

But in 1900, their attention turned to Cragsmoor and Chetolah. By that date, the Innesses had had five children, but two had died before the age of six, and a third died at the age of 18 in 1901. That left two daughters, Elizabeth (1880-1957) and Juliet (1881-1966). Elizabeth, the oldest, married Howard Greenley in 1903. Greenley, like his future father-in-law and George Inness before them, had studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, obtaining a diploma in architecture in 1901, and he had a distinguished career in architecture. He had worked at Carrere and Hastings and Hill and Green before going to Paris and went on to establish his own firm in New York City. He designed some remarkable buildings, such as the Prince George Hotel in New York City and the home of Edson Bradley in Newport, Rhode Island, which the reader can find on the Internet. Eventually, he became the President of the Architectural League of New York. But his first project upon returning with his Ecole des Beaux Arts diploma in 1901 appears to have been Chetolah – which the Innesses are said to have understood to be an Indian word for "love" rather than "Sweet Repose," as the Greatorex family believed.



The interior of Chetolah depicting the Victorian formality and elegance of the Inness's home.

The Innesses and Greenley obviously prized the setting of Chetolah more than the ramshackle Greatorex farmhouse itself, which they tore down to provide the site for a home greater than anything else in Cragsmoor. Work began in 1901, with JR Jones of Brooklyn as the contractor. The work not only included the house itself but residences for the two Inness daughters, a barn, garage, tennis house, studio, greenhouse and gatehouse – a total of 10 support structures – as well as extensive Italian and Greek formal gardens. The total cost was said to be around \$1 million, a huge amount in 1901.

The 42-room house, the centerpiece, was described in a 1980 National Register nomination thusly:

Inness's residence is an eclectic blend of styles and decorative features that combine to form an entirely unique building. The house's asymmetrical and rambling plan and the variety of its stone, shingled and stuccoed building materials, show the strong influence of the Queen Anne style. The abundant classical detailing found in the numerous round-arched doors and windows and the Composite columns and pilasters appear to show the influence of Greenley's recently completed studies....



George Innes Jr. Painting in His Studio

Among other features, the home had a porte-cochere, an art gallery, a huge studio with northern light, a walk-in safe to protect the artist's painting collection, several dining rooms, a library and a music room. And because George Inness apparently loved a spirit of mystery, there were secret passages through which he could pass unnoticed by his guests. Also, and somewhat unique for the period, it was apparently a year-round house, unlike most of the artists' residences built at the same time, which were used only in the warmer months. Outside the house were the extensive

terraced gardens, cascading down the slope and framing the view that had been so prized by the Greatorex family. And the Innesses continued to acquire property. Eventually, their holdings comprised approximately 350 acres.

Inness actively worked on the house. The *Cragsmoor Journal*, which reported extensively on the social activities of the art colony in the early years of the 20th century, reported in 1905 that "Mr. Inness" was working on his gardens and the neighboring roads as well as the house itself. For her part, "Mrs. Inness" was known for her "Tuesdays at Home" teas, to which "all on the mountain" were apparently invited. They were active members and supporters of Cragsmoor's Federated Church and leaders in the decision to open that church to all "believers in Christ." *CHI*, Vol 19, Issue 2, Summer, 2019. And it also appears that, notwithstanding their winter home in Tarpon Springs, the Innesses sometimes spent the entire year in Cragsmoor (1911-13) except for trips to their home in New York City. It also appears that Inness did most of his best work in Cragsmoor, including the paintings discussed at length in *George Inness, Jr., in Tarpon Springs, Florida*.

But all this came to an end on July 27, 1926, when George Inness, Jr., died at Chetolah. Following his death, Julia resolved to sell the property. In August of 1928, the *Cragsmoor Journal* reported that

...both summer and all-year residents of Cragsmoor congregated in the Barnstormers Theatre...at the reception tendered to Mrs. George Inness, Jr. While everyone was glad to meet everyone else and to partake of the delicious refreshments, a note of sadness hovered in the air, for we all realized that we were saying farewell to an honored friend and an invaluable member of our community. Mrs. Inness left Cragsmoor last Thursday morning and is now on her way to California, where she will visit her daughter. We hope that she will keep Cragsmoor in her heart wherever she may go, and sometime find her way back to the mountains which she and Mr. Inness loved so dearly.

The *Journal* went on to report that there were "rumors, not authentic, ...that a club of engineers have bid for the Inness estate and have given the first payment."

But in fact, the next owners of Chetolah were not a “club of engineers” but a remarkable and perhaps equally famous couple, August and Dorothy Jacobs Bellanca. August Bellanca (1880-1969) was born in Sicily and came to the United States in 1900. He was a labor organizer and one of the founders of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA). In August 1918, he married Dorothy Jacobs (1894-1946), a Jewish immigrant from Latvia who had begun organizing female immigrant buttonhole makers when she was only 15 years old. In 1914, she led her union from the more conservative United Garment Workers of America to August’s somewhat more radical ACWA. Four years later, in 1918, she married him, forming a domestic union as well! Among other things, they were friends with Fiorello LaGuardia and joined him in a successful attempt to prevent rifts between Italian and Jewish union members.

The mystery, at least for the present, is how and why this amazing couple bought a 42-room mansion in Cragsmoor. It seems possible that they could have been offered an advantageous price by Julia Inness, who may have wanted to leave Cragsmoor behind after the death of her beloved husband. And it could also have been that she needed the money. On May 17, 1913, in a letter maintained in the archives of the Smithsonian, George had written to a Mrs. Johnson responding to a plea that he and Julia should buy her stock in the Century Company, the enterprise started by Julia’s father 32 years earlier, for \$12,000. Notwithstanding the fact



1939 Daughters of Mary –
Cragsmoor, NY Stamp

that the Innesses maintained four residences (New York, Montclair, Tarpon Springs and Cragsmoor) and had spent \$1 million building Chetolah only a decade earlier, he told Mrs. Johnson that he and Julia could not buy the stock because they were “in a financially embarrassed condition.” That condition may not have improved by the time George died in 1926.

The Bellancas did not own the property long. By 1934, the *New York Times* was reporting that Chetolah had been “sold” to a resident of New York City whose name was not revealed. The article said that the property had been “assembled by the well-known landscape artist, George Inness, Sr., at a reported cost of about \$500,000,” a description which was completely wrong. And it turns out that the report of this purported sale itself was not accurate, for the property was in fact sold to the Daughters of Mary, Health of the Sick, Inc., on April 30, 1936.

The Daughters of Mary was a Roman Catholic religious institute for women founded in 1935 by the Rev. Edward F. Garesche, SJ, with authorization of the Archbishop of New York, Cardinal Patrick Joseph Hayes. They established Chetolah as their motherhouse, renaming it “Vista Maria,” and made many changes to the layout to accommodate their needs. Among other things, George Inness’s art gallery, with its clerestory windows in a hipped roof that were designed to shed soft light on the paintings, was converted into a chapel, as the postcard photograph shows. The Daughters of Mary also made significant changes to other structures, making one of the residences into a dormitory for the sisters.



The Gallery at Chetolah,

Photo on the left (CFL collection) is dated from the Inness’s residency of the home and the photo on the right is from the conversion to the occupancy of the Daughters of Mary. Although the bookcases and paintings have been replaced by paneling and pews in the later photo, the upper picture molding and paintings remained in both photos.

The Daughters of Mary devoted their time to caring for the sick and needy through a medical ministry as well as religious instruction. By 1966, there were 31 professed and novice sisters who served as teaching and medical missionaries, a kind of "religious Peace Corps." Among other things, they established medical missions in Guatemala and on Okinawa. In 1970, however, they closed Vista Maria, and in 1976 the order disbanded. Some of the members joined other religious orders, including the Sisters of Charity in New York.

At that point, from 1970 on, no one seems to have been looking after this historic house. The persons responsible were in New York City, not Cragsmoor, and the house appears to have been left deserted. Inevitably, vandalism and the ravages of time brought considerable damage to the house, the gardens, and the surrounding structures. In 1979, members of the Cragsmoor community, including Ella Stedner, Fred and Maureen Radl and Linda and Bob Rogers, tried to bring the community together to purchase the much-diminished structure and restore it as an arts center or for other public use. They assembled the documentation necessary to place the property, including the house and all the surrounding structures, on the state and national registers of historic places, and that application was successful in 1980. But despite the support of many in the community, including local historian Katharine Terwilliger, they were not able to assemble a coalition to make a purchase offer.

In 1980, the Diocese of New York took charge and began selling or leasing the properties. One of the Inness daughters' residences was sold to John Carmichael in 1980, and the principal residence - Chetolah - was leased to Nathaniel Hendricks of Brooklyn, who introduced himself to the Cragsmoor community as a "licensed real estate broker." He invited the community to come to a picnic at Chetolah on Library Day in 1983, letting them know that "since the house has no electricity," they should bring whatever they need.

In September of 1987, Mr. Hendricks purchased the property, with the Daughters of Mary, Health of the Sick, Inc. taking back a \$102,500 purchase money mortgage. Today, 35 years later, Mr. Hendricks still owns the unoccupied house, and many in the community continue to hope that this amazing structure, home to so much Cragsmoor history, can be preserved.

Jeffrey C. Slade

Dear Members, Friends and Neighbors,

Our small community has been changing. Many new, young families have moved to Cragsmoor and the joy of sharing our beautiful hamlet with new friends brings a richer life to all Cragsmoor residents. Cragsmoor's natural scenic beauty, fascinating past, interesting homes, and buildings make it a one-of-a-kind community, but the real beauty of this place is the close connection that we have with our neighbors. Every one of you shares in making our community what is and shaping the history of Cragsmoor.

Supporting CHS enables us to publish three historical journals a year, maintain the community outdoor spaces of the golf course and Cragsmoor Cemetery, produce educational and cultural events throughout the season and maintain the CHS building as a resource for our community.

We are asking you to renew your CHS annual membership or join for the first time. Single membership is \$25.00, Family is \$50.00, and Contributing Member is \$100.

For those members who no longer live in Cragsmoor but choose to keep your ties to the community through membership and donation, we are sincerely grateful.

For your convenience we have enclosed an addressed envelope, or you may pay your membership by using the **DONATE** Button with credit card or PayPal on our website:
cragsmoorhistoricalsociety.org

Please join us for our annual members meeting,
Saturday, June 18th, 9:30 at CHS.

Thank You for your support!

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www.cragsmoorhistoricalsociety.org

Spring, 2022

Cragsmoor Historical Society

CHS CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Saturday, June 18th, 9:30 am – Annual Members Meeting at CHS

Saturday, July 23th, 12:00- 4:00 - Golf Course Games & BBQ at CHS

Saturday, August 14th, 4:30 pm- 6:30 – Art on the Mountain at CHS

Saturday, September 17th, 9:30 – 12:00 – Mum Sale at the Post Office

October 29- 31st – Festival of Jack O' Lanterns Hayride and pumpkin illumination